

2009

The construction of interculturality in the context of foreign language education: a case study of Japanese language learning in Australian primary schools

Yuko Ramzan

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**The construction of interculturality in the context of
foreign language education:
a case study of Japanese language learning in
Australian primary schools**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the
award of the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

from

University of Wollongong

by

Yuko Ramzan

DipLibArts, B.Teaching (Primary Education),
MA (Cultural Studies),
MEd (TESOL)

Faculty of Education

2009

Certification

Candidate's declaration

I, Yuko Ramzan, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Signed.

Yuko Ramzan

Date:

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the teachers and students who agreed to participate in this research. Thank you also to the many language teachers who have shared their thoughts towards their profession with me.

This thesis would not have seen the end without the support of my friends and my family. In particular, my colleagues Elizabeth Thomson, Helen Kilpatrick, and Ritsuko Saito, and my research room mates Ken Cliff and Shooshi Dreyfus who have provided me with their wisdom, comfort, and encouragements whenever I needed it. Special appreciation goes to Sue Moran, my best friend, whose friendship, sense of humour, warmth and wisdom became a source of my energy to overcome this rocky road. Sue was always willing to assist me to make my English a more readable text.

My heartfelt appreciation goes to my supervisor Dr Christine Fox for her tireless support in getting me through the highs and especially the lows of this enormous task. I stood at the edge of quitting from this study many times, but I was back on the track each time after I spoke to Chris. Chris was not only simply my supervisor for this thesis. She was a lecturer when I was undertaking undergraduate study and was my mentor when I was working as a junior academic at the University of Wollongong. She was my supervisor when I was undertaking a project for Master of Education course. She has witnessed first hand how I survived to get to this end. It is due to her patience, advice and positive feedback that has helped me maintain my enthusiasm and direction. My appreciation also goes to Dr. Susan Hulmundt for her supervision in the early stage of my candidature.

Finally, to Ruku, Rez and Robert, thank you for being with me. I wouldn't have started this valuable journey if you weren't there, and I could not have completed this without you.

Abstract

This research investigated the construction of interculturality in the context of foreign language education in Australian primary schools. The study explored the curriculum areas of citizenship education and foreign language education within the Human Society and Its Environment Key Learning Area in NSW primary schools, focusing on how the curricula contribute to the goals of intercultural understanding, and examined the potential of applying Japanese language learning education as one of the tools to serve the development of students' interculturality.

The methodology used for this study is a qualitative paradigm. The study is a case study with multiple contexts including two primary schools, a high school and a university. The methodology and analysis are framed by grounded theory. The researcher's position in conducting this study is underpinned by cultural theory. Literature on globalisation, citizenship, language education and interculturality were explored.

The participants were thirty primary school students from two different schools, five high school students and the teachers of their Japanese language classes, five university students who are studying the Japanese language as their major, and other stakeholders. The researcher explored the participants' perceptions and beliefs regarding the multiple issues of identity, Japanese language teaching and learning and the development of interculturality. In addition, classroom observations were conducted and recorded over several months, curriculum documents were analysed, and teacher seminars and professional development courses were attended. The data analyses, coding and classifying, were conducted in three phases, each building upon the results of the other, as revealed in the grounded theory approach.

The results of this study are discussed around three key themes: self-identity construction through Japanese language learning experiences; schools as sites of cultural production and reproduction where the students' development of self-identity is crucially influenced; and language education for interculturality. The

students' school is a crucial location for the development of interculturality, where the curriculum can be planned to stimulate their subjective awareness of self, which is an important process in the development of this quality.

The result indicates that Japanese language education can be a tool to promote and develop interculturality. Recommendations have been proposed in three major areas: the position of language education in the school curriculum; teachers' professional development to enhance their interculturality; and future research. Language education should be a compulsory subject within any primary school curriculum. It is revealed that the importance of developing interculturality has to be manifested, not as a by-product of schooling, but should be purposefully directed. The notion of intercultural competency while learning a foreign language opens up new dimensions for the language teaching arena. Professional development of teachers, and longitudinal research to follow the outcomes of new language teaching approaches are crucial for today's society.

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List of Abbreviations

AEF	Asia Education Foundation
AFMLTA	Australian Federation of Modern Languages Teachers' Associations
AGQTP	Australian Government Quality Teacher Program
AIS	Association of Independent Schools
ALLP	Australian Languages and Literacy Policy
ALPLP	Asian Languages Professional Learning Project
BOS	Board of Studies New South Wales
CEG	Civic Expert Group
DEST	Australian Government, Department of Education, Science and Training
DET	Department of Education and Training
HSIE	Human Society and Its Environment
IEA	The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement study
ILT	Intercultural Language Teaching
ILTLP	Intercultural Language Teaching and Learning in Practice
K-6/K-10	Kindergarten to Year 6/10
KLA	Key Learning Areas
LOTE	Language Other Than English
MCEETYA	The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
NALSAS	National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools
NSW	New South Wales: A state of Australia
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
QLD	Queensland: A state of Australia
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
WA	Western Australia: A state of Australia

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Prologue

This study emerged from my personal experience of being both a Japanese language teacher and lecturer in Australia and a doctoral student who has been studying in Australia, working within a different educational, social and cultural environment from my Japanese origins. I am also wife of a man from a Fiji Indian cultural background, and mother of two sons who were born in Fiji and brought up within the Australian education system. In this prologue, my aim is to clarify my background as the researcher of this study.

In the year 2000, Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue, an Aboriginal woman and Australian of the Year, outlined three necessary qualities for responsible citizenship. She said these are: an ability to critically examine oneself and one's traditions; an ability to see beyond immediate group loyalties, extending to strangers the ethical concern we extend to friends and kin; and the ability to see the likely consequences of human behaviour, both intended and unintended. In January 2001, the Australia Day speech by astronomer Professor Bryan Gaensler, former Young Australian of the Year, was on the importance of educating Australian people to respect the culture, beliefs and rights of our native peoples. Tim Flannery, Australian of the Year 2007, in his Australia Day address in 2007 said that the land, its climate, creatures and plants are the only things that we share in common, and said that Australia's population policy should be based on recognition of environmental sustainability.

My experience as an immigrant, who cannot proudly participate in the ANZAC Day ceremony because of my Japanese background is significant. Because of my Japanese background and the knowledge of the Hiroshima tragedy, I am a pacifist. I cannot agree with commemorating any sort of war experience, even ANZAC Day. Does this mean that I am not a 'good citizen' of Australia?

I was born and brought up in Hokkaido, Japan, and lived there as one of the dominant Japanese cultural group for 27years. Japanese indigenous people still live in Hokkaido, but I know nothing about these people. I am ashamed of this,

but education in Japan while I was brought up seemed more concerned with how quickly Japanese people could catch up with the West, while making sure Japanese patriarchal society was maintained. My parents taught me to be a good Japanese person, honest and hard working, with the ability to keep harmony within their community. They taught me how to act sensibly within the family tradition. Sensible behaviour, in my parents' view, would include not seeking to stand out in a crowd, not displaying emotion, not being 'difficult' or promoting friction, and working hard without seeking prominence.

I was brought up in a typically traditional Japanese family. I lived in a society where the descriptive word of 'ordinary' provides a positive connotation rather than negative. There was no question about my identity. I was a Japanese woman who spoke Japanese language, followed Japanese tradition, and lived in Japan. While I was in Japan I never had an occasion to think who I was besides being Japanese.

Everything changed when I married my Fiji Indian husband, whose religion is Islam. After the marriage I lived in Fiji for six years, and in 1987 moved with my family to Australia. It's been twenty two years since then. In Fiji, I became a member by marriage of the small minority group of Islamic Fiji Indians (about 16% of the Fiji Indian community). Within the community I was accepted and also protected by my husband's identity as a local man. I also think that I was protected by my identity as a person who was from Japan, a country that contributed a large percentage of Fiji's economic assistance.

While in Fiji, I tried to be like a 'Fiji Indian woman'. In a way what I was trying to do was not to stand out and not to create friction. I thought if I could learn to be a Fiji Indian woman, I might somehow be able to melt into society and not stand out.

I was becoming one of the Fiji people, but there was no question about my identity as Japanese; I felt that more than ever. Within my new family in Fiji, I at first felt an outsider because I could not speak their language, I dressed differently, ate food differently. Acceptance increased enormously when I actually developed

the language skills to communicate with the people in their language, became able to cook their traditional meals, managed myself as a leading person of the family to celebrate their tradition and sometimes even dressed like the traditional Fiji Indian woman. My effort paid off in terms of gaining acceptance from the people.

However, although I knew that the people accepted me, I felt negative about Fiji and its people because, at that time, I felt they were not like Japan, Japanese people and this made me see the gap, rather than appreciate the difference. Looking back now, I believe I had quite an arrogant attitude, seeing myself as coming from a ‘modern’ and very ‘industrialised’ place, whereas Fiji was only a developing country. I did not realise that my attitude was very limited and narrow. The effort I made to be accepted by the society did not actually come from my humble attitude, it was just because of the way I was brought up. When I reflect on why I felt that way, I feel that I was trying to assimilate myself into the society by imitating them without respecting them.

The political situation for the Indian minority became worse, and there was a coup in 1987, which was not favourable to the Indian minority group in Fiji. We were forced into deciding to leave Fiji, with our two sons. We moved to Australia thinking about our sons’ future in Australia compared to their future life in Fiji as children from a minority Indian family. We moved at the end of December in 1987. Since then I have lived in Australia. My older son is now 28 years old and younger son 24 years. I am sure that we are described as a family of an ethnic minority group in Australia.

While each geographical shift changed my position of identity from a person who belongs to the dominant group to a little minority group and then a visibly distinct minority group, my self-identity remains the same; simply Japanese comes first before any description of myself. However, I live in Australia now, and I have been teaching Japanese language in Australia since 1988.

The thesis is concerned with identity, language, citizenship and ways in which young people learn to shift their intercultural understandings and attitudes through educational and personal experiences. The study reflects my personal journey

from my own country to my status as citizen of Australia. It aims to reach out to teachers and teacher educators to examine their own sense of identity, and to embrace the overarching principle of interculturality, that of creating an Australian society that is multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic, multi-religious, as well as harmonious and non-violent.